

# Presbyterian Church in America elects professor as leader

By **WILLIAM R. MACKLIN**

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PHILADELPHIA — The Rev. William S. Barker II, academic dean and professor of religious history at Westminster Theological Seminary in Glenside, has been elected to head the Presbyterian Church in America.

Barker, 59, was chosen moderator of the nation's second-largest Presbyterian denomination Monday by delegates at the PCA's 22nd general assembly, which is meeting in Atlanta this week.

As moderator, Barker will be chairman of the general assembly and offer the keynote address at next year's conference. The address, which he will deliver in the form of a sermon, is considered a barometer of the prevailing concerns of the PCA's members.

Contacted in Atlanta, Barker said he hopes to get the general assembly's 1,500 delegates to work together for the benefit of the PCA's 260 churches and 41,000 members.

"I want to provide a vision for the denomination that will transcend some of the minor issues over which we have contention," Barker said.

The PCA has avoided much serious infighting since its relatively quiet merger with the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod in 1982. Unlike the larger Presbyterian Church USA, the

PCA is doctrinally conservative and, said Barker, committed to remaining that way.

Churchwide discussions of worship style are expected to be mild, but there could be spirited debate about a proposed change in the PCA's relationship with the Christian Reformed Church.

Both churches are part of the North American Presbyterian Reform Council, and both bar women from the ordained ministry. Some general assembly delegates have called for the suspension of ties between denominations if the Christian Reformed Church lifts its ban during its synod next week. Others, including Barker, would prefer "to keep talking."

Barker, the first seminary professor named to his denomination's highest post, has had nearly three decades to develop his views on the issues facing the PCA.

A Princeton University graduate, he holds advanced degrees in history and religious history from Cornell and Vanderbilt universities and worked for three years as editor of the now-defunct Presbyterian Journal in Asheville, N.C.

In 1972, he became professor of church history at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis and eventually served as the theology school's president. He has been at Westminster, which is near Philadelphia, for seven years.

Westminster Seminary President Samuel T. Logan said he was not surprised by Barker's election.